STATISTICAL BUREAU

Christian Unity

An Appeal to the World

Report of the Commission on Christian Unity of the Christian Church to the American Christian Convention at Conneaut, Ohio, May 5, 1919, and unaimously adopted by that body.

Report of Standing Committee on Christian Unity

COMMISSION ON CHRISTIAN UNITY

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Your committee regrets that it has not had a long line of predecessors in the duties which you have committed to it. The Christian Church has always been favorable to unity, but without much definition as to its nature or a program of methods by which it could be secured. Though we have been hospitable to proposals from others, we have been tardy in taking the initiative. Our attitude has been feminine, rather than masculine—marked by a willingness to be wooed, but seldom wooing.

This may have encouraged others to regard us as narrow, aloof, and indifferent. Suggestions of federation, amalgamation, or union have not infrequently been the signal for unfortunate public discussion of decidedly reactionary tendencies. Here may be found a part of the explanation of why we have been unable to seriously impress others with our position on union; or to be always invited when conferences have been called

to consider questions related to it. The unification of the people of God has been the great thing which, despite our paucity, a denomination of our principles could have done much to consummate. We should have had an alert, resourceful and aggressive committee, charged with the functions of this presnt committee, in well organized operation through most of the years of our denominational history.

In April of last year, 1918, by invitation of the Disciples of Christ, a conference was held with representatives of that Church at Norfolk, Virginia. The result was a better mutual understanding on some points which have been alienating in influence heretofore. Plans were effected for the avoidance of causes of contention in the future. This whole matter was again unfortunate in the manner of its introduction to our people preceding the meeting, but the conference was gratifying in results and gives promise of increasingly congenial relations with that great body of believers.

A fraternal delegate also represented us at an annual council of the Christian Union Church, with pleasing results to both denominations. A complete outline of these conferences will be found in the printed report of the Convention Secretary. Your committee, having been appointed as recently as December, 1918, can speak with more appropriateness of future plans than of past

achievements. We believe our people should now stress Christian Unity with a new zeal.

In these times, the great fundamentals are so urgent that we have no time to waste quibbling over differences. True religion tends to unite men; theological distinctions tend to separate them. We are living in a new age; old things have passed away; behold, all things are become new. Differences that were great and regarded as vital a few years ago have almost faded from the thought of the world. The glory won in the theological debates of the past has been dimmed by the radiance of the brotherhood of the present.

There will perhaps never come to us again a more favorable opportunity for the unification of Christians than is ours to-day. The thought of the Church is vibrant with the life of a united brotherhood. The Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America—the largest and most effective unit of expression the people of God now have—and many other organizations and movements clearly indicate the thought and desire of all Christians for a fuller fellowship. Of all the people of the world who ought to be glad and rejoice, it is the people here assembled who for a hundred and more years have taught the things that are being taught to-day by the whole body of believers.

The unspeakable war has increased the mental and spiritual temperature of the

world to such a point that the soul of the race has reached a height in spiritual experience and Christian influence never known before.

The peoples of the earth to-day are as different from what they were five years ago as a piece of cold iron is different from one into which a strong electric current is flowing. The soul of the race is so quickened that it glows and radiates, and in its influence reaches a circle never yet touched by either divine or human power. The times demand unity of life and activity and the whole human race is calling to the Church for light, for leadership, for guidance. In the presence of this insistent call, the Church should and must be one.

We note with gladness the drawing together of denominations similar in faith and polity. We should abet such fusions by every possible act within our power. However, we recognize that unless this movement is carried on to its complete consummation, the result will be but fewer and larger groups equally denominationalistic in spirit. Federation is only a makeshift of the opportunist and a compromise with ecclesiastical arrogance. The gathering together of those affinitous in thought or method is but a sectarianism of broader gauge than that formerly followed. The ultimate must be unity, not into self-selective groups of common tastes, but by an inclusion so complete that

not one true follower of Jesus Christ in all the world is omitted. In a divinely constituted brotherhood, there will be no exclusion of the Father's children. If there are such, the old human domination, which has always been responsible for the divisions of the Church, is amply attested. A true union must be effected upon a basis that does not invalidate the authority of God nor abridge the rights which He has given to the individual. The insertion of any presumptuous human authority or insistence upon group interpretations cannot make for real and universal union.

We must subject our purposes to careful scrutiny. Since the days of Babel, movements to "make us a name" have come to a uniform end. A desire for unity for the sake of "bigness" is born out of unregenerate vanity. To unite because of congenialty is but gratifying our desire for personal or collective pleasure. There is but one motive sufficiently large to promote a genuine union and include all who should be a part of it—that is an absolute, loving commitment to the will and program of Jesus Christ without any reservations or prejudices injected from any source.

Upon this premise, the Christian Church, assembled in its quadrennial session of The American Christian Convention, hereby makes loving overtures to all true Christians everywhere, of whatever name or order, to

unite by legal incorporation, placing all interests now owned and controlled by said Convention under the ownership and control of the amalgamated organization. The basis of union shall exclude all man-made exactions and interpretations which have never been otherwise than both arrogant and divisive. It shall derive its government, always to be democratic, from the people composing it. All of its official gatherings shall be representative of the people and such representation shall be voted by them. No test of faith shall be established other than the acceptance of Jesus Christ as the Savior and the Word of God as a standard for the conduct of life and the guide of the Church. No person, or group of persons, shall impose a dogma, form of worship, or practice of an ordinance upon any within its membership. The standing of all members shall be equal. They shall each be free to follow the Lord as His Spirit and Word directs them. Their standing in the Church shall be based upon their Christian conduct —not upon the theological opinions of themselves or others. The designation of this body of believers shall be Scriptural, instead of derived from some feature of ecclesiastical practice. It shall be a union founded in fellowship solely upon righteousness in character and practice.

Be it resolved by The American Christian Convention, representing the religious body

known as Christian, that we send greetings to all our brethren in the Lord, enjoining them to stand fast in the liberty wherein Christ hath made them free; that they be not again entangled with the yoke of ecclesiastical bondage. Also, that we hereby authorize the Committee on Christian Unity to seek and respond to conferences with any and all religious bodies desirous of union upon the basis herein stated.

And inasmuch as heretofore the poison of suspicion has been fruitful in keeping believers apart, and whereas its removal would go far toward enabling Christians to dwell together in unity, we here and now resolve to eliminate that poison from our own hearts so that, being of the same mind, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind, doing nothing through faction or vain glory, but in lowliness of mind, each counting the other better than himself, not looking each of you to his own things, but each of you also to the things of others, dwell together in the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace, and thus walk together the highway of holiness with all who believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.